

Places of the Passion: The Courtyard

Matthew 26:69-75 69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said. 70 But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.” 72 He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!”

73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.” 74 Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!” Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

James 2: 8-13 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Noel Coward, a famous British playwright who died in 1973, once played a joke on twenty of the most famous men in London. He sent all twenty men an identical note that read: “Everybody has found out what you have done. If I were you, I would get out of town.” What did all twenty men do? All twenty men got out of town!

What if you opened your mail one day and found such a note? “Everybody has found out what you have done. If I were you, I would get out of town!” What would race through your mind? The income you hid from the IRS? All the time at work you spent playing video games? The expense account you inflated? Your secret rendezvous in Las Vegas? **[NOTE 1]**

It’s called the g-word. What’s the G-word you ask? I will tell you, Guilt! Sometimes guilt can sit on our chest like a concrete block until we feel sick—sick enough to die!

Maybe there's someone on the planet who hasn't known guilt, a quagmire of remorse, an ongoing note to self, "You're worthless"—but I've never met that person. What sucked you under? A one-night stand? A back-street brawl? Or maybe your guilt isn't the result of a moment but of a season in life. You failed as a parent. You squandered your youth or your money—or both. The result? Guilt!

We're in a sermon series based on the gospel of Matthew called Places of the Passion. Today we walk to a Courtyard in Jerusalem—the Courtyard of a high priest named Caiaphas. In Caiaphas' courtyard we see guilt—Peter's guilt and our own guilt. Beyond the courtyard we see grace—grace for Peter and grace for us.

To get the context, we rewind the tape and go back to Gethsemane. The Claim. "Peter answered him, 'Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.' Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.' Peter said to him, 'Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!'" (Matthew 26:33–34) Ken preached on that and talked about how Peter and you and me rely on ourselves instead of God.

Jesus and Peter had been through so much together. Three years earlier, Jesus was walking on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus sees Peter fishing with his brother Andrew and calls them to follow. "I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19). Peter and Andrew follow. One day, about a year later, Peter follows Jesus out onto the Sea of Galilee during a whale of a storm. Peter walks on the water, but then he begins to sink. Jesus immediately reaches out his hand, takes hold of Peter, and saves him. Why did he start to sink? Because he got his eyes off Jesus and looked at the waves. He didn't focus on Jesus!

At Caesarea Philippi, Peter says to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16) After that, Jesus takes Peter—along with James and John—to see his glory on the Mt. of Transfiguration. Then Jesus invites this same trio to witness his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter, takes inventory of how he feels and makes the claim, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" Jesus made it very clear that Peter would fall. **[NOTE 2]**

But we've all made that claim. For some of us who grew up in the Lutheran church, when we got confirmed the pastor asked, "Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed remain true to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even to death?" We said, "I do!" When we got married, the pastor asked, "Will you take this man to be your wedded husband?" You women said, "I do!" "Will you take this woman to be your wedded wife?" We men said, "I do!" The claim. The claim? That's easy. Paul wrote in Romans chapter 7, "I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong ...I want to do what is good, but I don't."

The Cracks. As the events in the courtyard unfold, it's like watching cracks in a house's foundation slowly spread. A servant girl comes up to Peter and says,

“You were with Jesus the Galilean.” Peter denies it, saying, ‘I don’t know what you mean.’” (Matthew 26:70) The first crack. **[NOTE 3a]**

Peter then goes out to the courtyard’s entrance, when another servant girl sees him. She says to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” Again Peter denies it. Only this time with an oath: “I don’t know the man.” (Matthew 26:72) The second crack. **[NOTE 3b]**

When there are enough cracks, the foundation crumbles, and there will always be a collapse. Always!

The Collapse. “After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.’ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I don’t know the man.’” (Matthew 26:73–74) We know from first-century documents that the Jews in Galilee spoke a different dialect of Aramaic. It’s like when we hear someone talking who is from the deep South or from Boston. Did you pahk the cah? Well bless your heart? Peter’s accent betrayed him. **[NOTE 3c]**

What does Peter do? The expression “invoke a curse on himself” is where we get the English word anathematize. Anathematize means “be eternally condemned.” Paul uses the same word in Galatians 1:8, 9. “If anyone preaches a different Gospel to you let him be anathematized—eternally condemned.” Peter would rather be condemned than admit he knows Jesus. You didn’t realize Peter had gone that far did you. Before the research for this sermon, I didn’t either.

First comes Peter’s evasive denial. Then comes Peter’s direct denial—on oath. Now comes Peter’s curse. What’s next? The rooster crowed.

The collapse. For us it happens when we say, “Just one more drink.” Or, “just one more lie.” Or, “just one more fling.” Or, “just one more look.” Crack. Crack. Crack. But one more leads to one more, and then just one more. When there are enough cracks, there will always be a collapse. Always! Then what? Enter the G-word. The G-word? Guilt! **[NOTE 4]**

Then what are our options? Numb it with a drink during happy hour. Numb it through binge shopping; binge internet games; binge eating; binge drinking; binge Netflix, Peacock, or Tubi streaming TV and movies.

Deny it. Pretend the rooster never crowed. Concoct a plan to cover it all up. One lie, though, leads to another lie, then to another lie. Before long we have to adjust the second lie to align with the first lie, then the third lie to align with the second lie. Numb it. Deny it.

Bury it. Bury your guilt beneath a mountain of work and a calendar of appointments. The busier we stay, the less time we have to spend with that one person we have come to dislike the most—ourselves.

Punish it. Cut ourselves. Flog ourselves. If not with whips then with rules. Create a long list of things to do. Pray more! Study more! Show up earlier and stay up later.

Minimize it. We didn't sin, we just lost our way. We didn't sin, we just got caught up in the moment. We didn't sin, we just took the wrong path.

Redirect it. Lash out at the kids. Lash out at your spouse, your coworkers, your cat, your dog, the driver in the next lane, the man in the yellow submarine—whoever!

Offset it. Build the perfect family. Create the perfect career. Score perfect grades. And be completely intolerant of mistakes by yourself or other people. Guilt—the G-word—turns us into miserable, weary, angry, duplicitous, stressed-out people. Guilt sucks the life right out of us. Grace ... restores it. Grace? Did someone say grace?

How does that happen? The Confession. “Peter went out and wept bitterly.” (Matthew 26:75) Peter didn't numb his guilt. Deny it. Bury it. Punish it. Minimize it. Redirect it. Offset it. Peter confessed his guilt. Period. **[NOTE 5]**

While Peter went outside the courtyard to confess, Jesus went to the cross to die. Jesus doesn't wait until we get it all together. Jesus doesn't wait until we overcome our temptations and fight our demons and conquer our sin. Paul says in Romans 5:8, “God shows his love for us in this—while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” In our courtyard, we see guilt. Beyond our courtyard—at the cross—we see grace. And grace means what? Unmerited, undeserved, favor or forgiveness! Grace means a comeback.

The Come Back. Who preaches the sermon on Pentecost? Peter. Whose sermon converts 3,000 people? Peter. Who writes two books in the New Testament? Peter. Listen closely. Come backs don't depend on how much we love Jesus! (That surprise you?) Come backs depend on how much Jesus loves us!! Come backs don't depend on what we do for Jesus. Come backs depend on what Jesus does for us. Come backs don't depend upon us giving our life for Jesus. Come backs depend on Jesus giving his life for us. **[NOTE 6]**

Our story isn't over when Jesus is in it. Isn't that great? Our story isn't over when Jesus is in it. We can all comeback from guilt. How? The best G-Word of all. Grace. So what are you going to do about it? Write down one thing you can do today to move from guilt to grace! Write down one thing that you can do to let Jesus heal and mend the cracks. Let's pray ... Amen. By Reed Lessing. © 2021 Creative

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Sermon Notes for “The Places of the Passion: The Courtyard”
based on Matthew 26:69-75 and James 2: 8-13
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- I. Satan uses the “G-word” (guilt) to try to control us. Peter messed up and did the very thing that he promised he would not do. And he wept bitterly. It could have derailed his ministry, his impact, but it didn’t. Jesus later restored him.
- II. In one sense or another we have all made the claim, “I will not deny Jesus.” We all have fallen short of being the Christ-follower we are called to be.
- III. Every time Peter tells people he doesn’t know Jesus it gets worse.
 - a. “I don’t know the man” is the first crack/denial.
 - b. This time with an oath, “I don’t know the man.” Crack/denial #2. When there are enough cracks, the foundation crumbles.
 - c. The third time, Peter invokes a curse on himself and again reiterates that he doesn’t even know what they are talking about. Just because he has an accent, it doesn’t mean he is Jesus’ friend. The foundation crumbles and collapse occurs.
- IV. After the collapse comes the G-word. What do you do with your guilt? Some of us Numb it, others deny it, bury it, punish it, minimize it, redirect it, try to offset it ... Peter confessed his guilt, and Grace won!
- V. For the Guilt to be turned to the other “G-word”, GRACE, we need to confess our sins and give it to Jesus. Grace leads to a comeback and a healing or erasing of the cracks if we let it. Comebacks don’t depend on how much we love Jesus, but rather how much Jesus loves us. Let Him have it all. Receive what Jesus offers you.
- VI. What are you going to do about it? What step are you going to take this week to give it all to Jesus and let Him create a comeback win? Please write an “I will _____” statement.